

VZCZCXRO1233
OO RUEHPA
DE RUEHUJA #0155/01 0421136
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 111136Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0249
INFO ECOWAS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH IMMEDIATE 0009
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS IMMEDIATE
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH IMMEDIATE 0009
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA IMMEDIATE 0065

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 ABUJA 000155

SIPDIS
STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, AF/PDPA, DRL, INR/AA
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PASS TO AMEMBASSY MALABO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/01/26
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [OVIP](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [SOCI](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON ENGAGES WITH GOODLUCK JONATHAN ON
DEMOCRACY, ELECTIONS, TSA LIST, AND BNC; JONATHAN BECOMES ACTING
PRESIDENT

REF: ABUJA 0246 AND PREVIOUS

CLASSIFIED BY: James P. McAnulty, Political Counselor, U.S. Embassy
Abuja, Political Section; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

SUMMARY

11. (C) U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Ambassador Johnnie Carson engaged in a lively dialogue with Nigerian Vice President Goodluck Jonathan February 9 on democracy and constitutional succession, the need for credible national elections, prospects for removal of Nigeria from a terrorism watch list, signing of a U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission (BNC) framework agreement, and regional and internal stability. Ambassador, PolCouns (note taker), and Special Assistant Cook accompanied the Assistant Secretary. Ambassador Carson described Nigeria as one of the most important countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, along with South Africa, to U.S. national interests. Noting Nigeria's current "uncertain period," owing to President Yar'Adua's prolonged absence, he emphasized the need for a democratic, constitutional transfer of power, should such a transition become necessary. The Nigerian Government (GON), he said, must conduct "substantially better" national elections in 2011 or risk losing domestic and international credibility. The U.S. stood ready to provide technical and financial help, as long as the GON remained committed to holding credible elections. Vice President Jonathan promised to do so, building upon lessons learned from two recent elections in Edo and Anambra States. Ambassador Carson remarked that holding credible elections would represent a "tremendous legacy" for both Yar'Adua and Jonathan. The Vice President appealed for the U.S. to remove Nigeria from the U.S. "countries of interest" list. Carson promised a prompt review but noted that the GON must enhance airport security screening, enact counter-terrorism legislation, and speak out officially and forcefully against international terrorism. Both agreed that instability in Somalia posed threats to the Horn of Africa, the continent, and the international community. Assistant Secretary Carson and Vice President Jonathan agreed to a prompt signing of the framework agreement for the U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission (BNC). On February 10, 2010, the Senate and House of Representatives named Jonathan officially as Acting President of Nigeria. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Assistant Secretary Carson, accompanied by Ambassador, Political Counselor (note taker), and Special Assistant Cook, first conveyed greetings February 9 to Vice President Jonathan from the U.S. President and Secretary of State, including expressions of hope for the recovery of ailing President Yar'Adua. Ambassador Carson emphasized that the U.S. regarded Nigeria, along with South Africa, as one of the two most important countries in sub-Saharan Africa, given the nation's presence on the UN Security Council, leadership of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), role in peace-keeping missions, status as a major destination of U.S. investment, supplier of petroleum, and having both the largest number of new African immigrants and a shared set of values with the United States. All of this, coupled with its commitment to democracy, makes Nigeria's stability important.

13. (C) Assistant Secretary Carson remarked on the "uncertain period" prevailing in Nigeria owing to President Yar'Adua's prolonged absence. He asserted that a constitutional, democratic transfer of authority would best serve the interests of the Nigerian people, should such a transition become necessary. Declaring that rule of law and the country's Constitution should guide any potential succession, as expected in any democracy, he noted that the U.S. would continue to closely observe developments.

ABUJA 00000155 002 OF 005

14. (C) Vice President Jonathan, recalling his brief exchange with the Assistant Secretary last July in Libya, expressed appreciation for his remarks and for letters received from U.S. officials expressing best wishes for the President's health. He acknowledged that Yar'Adua's prolonged absence had led to challenges, including rumors of possible military intervention. He insisted that he and his GON colleagues continued to deal with the situation as best as they could. He asked for U.S. understanding and technical assistance, particularly in the health, economic, and power sectors and on elections.

PROMOTING CREDIBLE ELECTIONS

15. (C) The Vice President, commenting that Nigerians sometimes perceived U.S. criticism as overly harsh, said Nigeria must work hard to build institutional capacity to conduct "clean" elections. He acknowledged that, if not done properly, such elections would lack legitimacy in the eyes of other nations. Observing that one could not promote good governance and accountability without first ensuring the proper counting of citizens' votes, he expressed determination to hold national elections that local and international observers would accept as credible. He cited the experiences of two latest contests in Edo and Anambra States as preparing the way for conducting better elections in 2011. The GON, he said, would correct "significant problems" identified by civil society, security services, and international observers from these races to conduct elections for which everyone would be "proud." (COMMENT: Candidates from the opposition Action Congress (AC) and All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), respectively, won the National Assembly by-election in Edo and the gubernatorial race in Anambra, with most observers characterizing the results in both contests as credible. END COMMENT.)

16. (C) Jonathan expressed his determination to complete long-promised electoral reforms. He noted that he had to overcome initial opposition party skepticism, when he earlier chaired an inter-party committee on electoral reform. He declared that

holding proper elections would be the "right thing" to do, even if the ruling party risked losing such contests. Lamenting that the democratic process did not always move as quickly as desired, he said he sought to preserve separation of powers and avoid the appearance of dictating reforms to the legislature. The GON, he said, would communicate recommendations but not dictate them in an overbearing way. Referring to President Yar'Adua's request in late October through the U.S. Ambassador and U.K. High Commissioner on election issues, Jonathan reiterated GON desire for technical assistance in conducting a credible process. He pledged that the nation's electoral system would remain open to international scrutiny.

17. (C) Assistant Secretary Carson responded that the U.S. remained ready to provide technical and financial assistance to help Nigeria conduct "substantially better" elections, provided that the GON showed political will and determination to hold credible elections. A recent election assessment team sponsored by the U.S. and United Kingdom (UK) and led by a distinguished African legal and election expert, Carson added, had identified ways to improve the conduct of elections in Nigeria. The GON, he suggested, could implement some of the team's recommendations administratively, without needing statutory changes. While improved legislation could promote greater external credibility, he asserted that implementing such administrative measures as improving voter registration lists,

ABUJA 00000155 003 OF 005

promoting voter participation, and enhancing ballot-counting would produce more transparent elections.

18. (C) Vice President Jonathan, referring to his involvement in elections since 1999, declared that punishing those who commit electoral offenses would be key to promoting better elections. He said he had directed the Inspector General of Police (IGP) to investigate all offenders regardless of their position in society, beginning with the just-concluded Anambra elections. While the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had responsibility for prosecuting electoral offenses, he admitted that INEC officials focused more on declaring election results. Accordingly, he instructed the police and INEC officials to set up a joint team to start prosecuting people under criminal statutes. Noting that "fraud is fraud," he said authorities would prosecute under criminal statutes anyone who altered figures from election returns.

19. (C) Ambassador Carson welcomed this commitment, remarking that the recently-completed report of the U.S.-UK assessment team provided valuable guideposts to improve elections. He promised to forward copies to the Vice President and Foreign Minister. He reiterated the U.S. pledge to provide technical, administrative, and financial help to put Nigeria on the path towards holding "substantially better" elections. The Assistant Secretary said the holding of credible elections would not only represent a "historic turnaround" for Nigeria but a "tremendous legacy" for both Yar'Adua and Jonathan, which Nigerians would forever remember.

TSA WATCH LIST

10. (C) Vice President Jonathan lamented the attempted bombing of a U.S. airliner December 25, 2009, by a Nigerian national. He characterized the suspect's behavior as contrary to Nigerian culture and beliefs and expressed concern over U.S. placement of Nigeria on the "countries of interest" list. In the wake of the

incident, he noted that he had directed GON security agencies to cooperate fully with U.S. investigators and to work to prevent such an attack from recurring. He noted that periodic violence in Nigeria involved strictly domestic issues and targets. At no time, he declared, had such Nigerian groups linked up with international terrorists or attacked any foreign diplomatic missions. He suggested that removing Nigeria from the list would provide a "clear signal" of close ongoing cooperation and enhance bilateral relations. The proposed BNC, he added, would serve as a proper venue for discussing terrorism and other important issues twice annually.

¶11. (C) Ambassador Carson expressed regret over the need to place a friend and partner, Nigeria, on the Transportation Security Administration's watch list of "countries of interest" as a result of the December 25, 2009, attack. Noting that a deep U.S. concern drove the decision, he suggested that all countries, including the U.S. and Nigeria, must recognize the threat and find ways to work more closely to protect themselves from international terrorists. While 99.9 percent of the people in both countries remained law-abiding citizens, authorities must guard against the harmful activities of a relative few. No country remained immune from such threats. Even U.S. citizens, he said, had committed terrorist attacks, both domestically and abroad. Carson promised a speedy review of the decision, suggesting that the GON take concrete steps to improve airport screening, including use of body scanners, enact

ABUJA 00000155 004 OF 005

counter-terrorism legislation, and speak out officially and forcefully against acts of terrorism wherever they occurred.

BINATIONAL COMMISSION

¶12. (C) On the BNC, Assistant Secretary Carson said scheduling conflicts had prevented the Secretary and Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe from signing the BNC framework agreement earlier. He pledged to move forward on this important process, expressing hope that the signing would occur by the end of March.

REGIONAL AND INTERNAL STABILITY

¶13. (C) Assistant Secretary Carson noted that he and Foreign Minister Maduekwe had engaged in productive discussions earlier that day on regional security, including the impact of instability in Somalia on the Horn of Africa, the continent, and the international community. Instability in Somalia has led to an outflow of thousands of refugees into Kenya and Ethiopia and greater trafficking of illicit weapons across international boundaries. Piracy has affected the maritime vessels of many nations. He expressed appreciation for Nigeria's help in promoting regional stability, including contributing troops to peace-keeping missions and providing training in other countries.

¶14. (C) Jonathan acknowledged the threats posed by instability in Somalia to the international community. He remarked that no country should allow criminal elements to operate anywhere within

its borders. Nigeria, he continued, had its own difficulties in dealing with criminal groups, particularly in his home region of the Niger Delta. The first phase of amnesty implemented by President Yar'Adua, he commented, represented a critical stage, but he averred that follow-on phases would be even more critical to the program's success. He noted that the President's absence during the past two months had caused a "slow pace" of implementation. He pledged to accelerate implementation, noting that he would host a major meeting on February 10 to discuss capacity building and training of youth for employment in the oil sector. The Vice President said he would welcome U.S. technical assistance.

COMMENT

¶15. (C) Vice President Jonathan appeared more relaxed and confident than he did during previous recent meetings with senior U.S. officials. On February 10, the Senate and the House of Representatives passed resolutions designating him as Acting President. Prior to that Jonathan had exercised care to avoid the perception of prematurely seeking the Presidency. During recent weeks, he has assumed an increasingly active role, including

ABUJA 00000155 005 OF 005

deploying troops to Jos to quell communal violence and receiving the credentials of Chiefs of Mission designates. With Jonathan now acting officially as President this should quiet the political storm for a while. Everyone here recognizes, however, that this is a short-to-medium term solution as National Assembly resolutions are not binding. Nonetheless, most are pleased by the attempt to find a short-term solution to the political uncertainty that had plagued the nation over the last several months. END COMMENT.

PARTICIPANTS

¶16. (U) The following officials attended the meeting:

United States:

Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson

U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria Robin Renee Sanders

Political Counselor James P. McAnulty (note taker)

Special Assistant for African Affairs Akunna E. Cook

Nigeria:

Vice President Goodluck Jonathan

Minister of Foreign Affairs Chief Ojo Maduekwe

Vice President's Principal Secretary Chief Mike Oghiadomhe

Acting Nigerian Ambassador to the U.S. Babagana Wakil

Senior Advisor for Political Matters Dr. Akilu Sani Indabawa

Special Advisor for Legal Matters Barrister A. A. Gulak

Senior Special Assistant for Media and Publicity Ima Niboro

Senior Special Assistant for National Development Matters Dr.
Ifediora Amobi

Senior Special Assistant for Development Cooperation Femi Ajayi

Senior Special Assistant for International Relations Geoffrey
Tanaliebe

Other officials from the Vice President's Office and Foreign
Ministry

17. (U) Assistant Secretary Carson departed from Abuja before
having the opportunity to clear on this telegram.
SANDERS